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## INTRODUCTORY.

We are justly proud of our museums.

Not the smallest part of their value is that they contain innumerable examples of things of practical utility, lifted into the category of works of art by the combined skill of the designer and handicraftsman.

But is it not a suggestive reflection that these very things, which we now lock up in glass cases to be looked at but not touched, were originally articles of everyday use and not always by the extremely rich? They were a vital part of the civilization of their times; a product of and constant stimulus to the prevalent artistic culture. Now, in our museums, they are, to all intents and purposes, hidden away, for though they can be seen, they seldom are seen, except in a fitful and unintelligent fashion. They are so numerous that the average visitor is confused and wearied, and he passes through the galleries, punctuating his general attitude of incomprehension with an occasional exclamation of delight. Even such cursory acquaintance with what is beautiful, doubtless, does him some good; but it is very far from intimately affecting the trend of his life or the cultivation of his taste. His actual life is never touched.

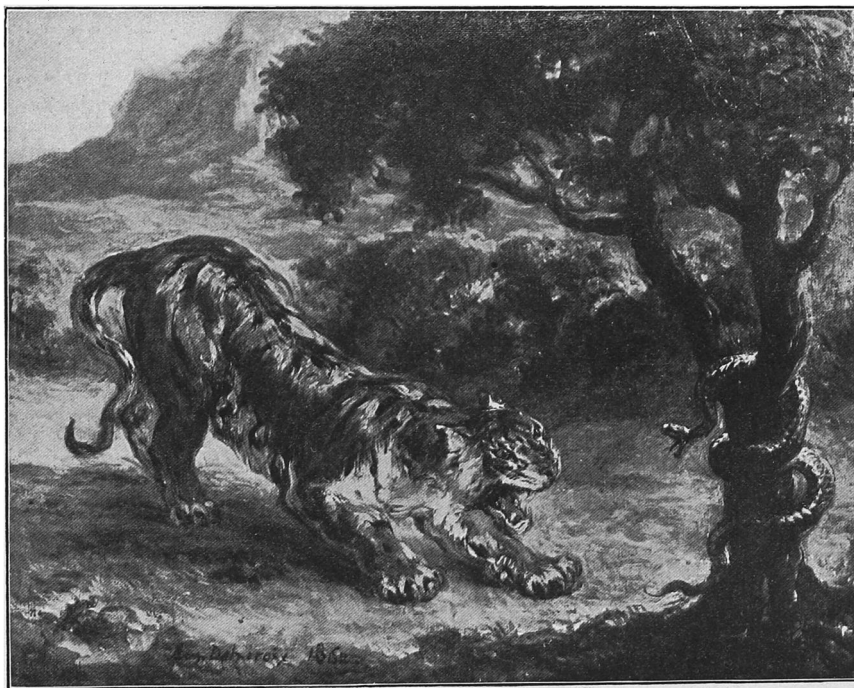
To the student, on the other hand, these treasures are a valuable source of inspiration; or would be if our art students sought it. But for the most part they do not. It is the pictures, the sculptures, in a museum, also the architectural exhibits, which absorb nearly all their interest. Once in a while a designer makes practical use of his oppor-

tunities; but it is not so much to gain inspiration, as to flatly steal; he copies wholesale, and we may be thankful if he does not vulgarize or enslave the design by "adapting" it to the needs of cheap production. For example, he selects some excellent design in Italian jewelry,—work, perhaps, whose chief beauty is in the exquisite expression of the handicraftsman's feeling and skill,—and tries to reproduce the effect by machinery. While the original was wrought with tender hammer-strokes or the sensitive handling of the graving tool, the machine squats down upon a bit of soft metal and stamps out the so-called design at one sitting; repeating the dreary farce ten, twenty, a hundred-fold, according to the manufacturer's estimate of the gullibility of his public. There are ones and twos, possibly scores and even more of people in this great metropolis who will repudiate his efforts to overreach them; but the vast majority, the great army of buyers, are quite content with the anemic product of the persistent die-stamp. Even if they were confronted with the original in the museum, they would probably fail to appreciate its superiority.

Now, compare with the beauty of these art-industries of other times and civilizations, the average productions of our own. "Average," be it noted; for there are individuals and firms in this country vying not unsuccessfully with the artistic work of the past. I may have occasion to mention them in subsequent papers; but for the present attention is directed to the output of articles by the general run of producers.

The Art Museum is the lock-up of ancient industrial art, waiting for a jail delivery of taste. Meanwhile we have dozens of museums of modern industrial art in the city,—the department stores. They are crowded from morning till night, six days out of the week, and not by mere sight-seers, carrying away little if any impression, but by buyers, carrying off to their homes object-lessons of ignorance and tastelessness, to corrupt the taste of their children and make progress in true knowledge of the beautiful almost an impossibility. In these stores you will find the rankest exhibition of brutal ignorance and the most cynical disregard of taste in the generality of those articles which come under the head of "art-industries."

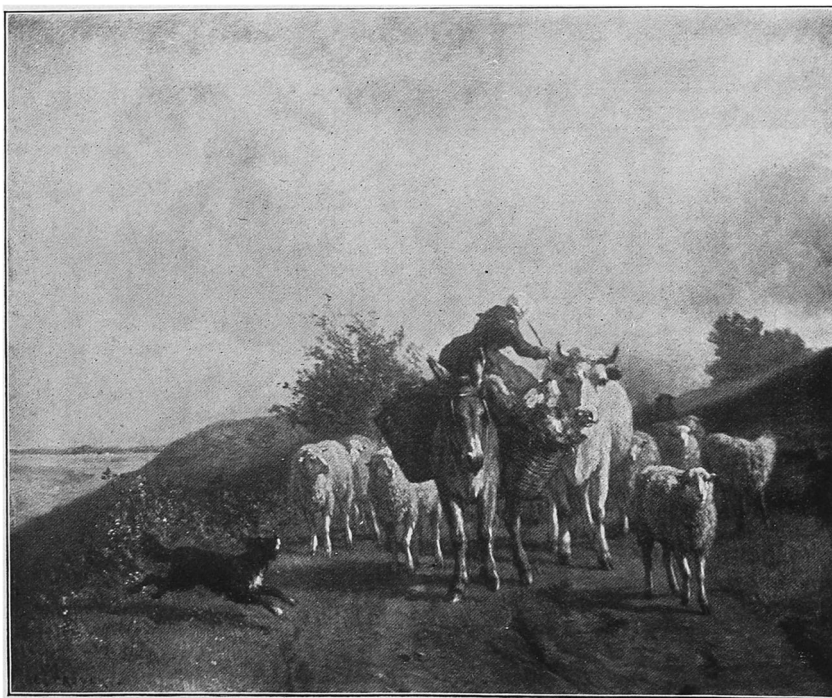
Of course it will be replied: "What else can be expected in a de-



EUG. DELACROIX.

TIGER AND SERPENT.

13 x 16.



C. TROYON.  
GOING TO MARKET.  
21½ x 25½.

partment store?" But the question involves a horrible admission: that the vast majority of the people are only fit to wallow in ignorance, and that these mammoth sloughs of despond are inevitable and necessary. If this be true, I for one am wasting my energies in writing upon this subject, for the rich and cultured man needs no help. His command of money enables him to secure the most artistic products, and what the modern cannot produce he will procure from the dealers in antiques. But there are also cultured people who are not rich. Is it nothing to them that it is well-nigh impossible to buy artistic articles of every-day use at a moderate price? Then the masses—our whole system of education is directed to the uplifting of the people, and it is generally admitted that aesthetic development, as well as physical, mental and moral, is advisable. So far as the department stores are concerned, their aesthetic condition is very much that of a man mixed up in the debris of a railway wreck—a wreck of all canons and traditions of good art and decent workmanship—with his sensibilities jammed into paralysis.

On the other hand, it is not only in the inferno of the bargain-hunters that you will find the abortion of ignorance and lack of taste. That gold Loving Cup for Dewey, manufactured—please mark the choice of word—by one of "our leading firms"; dumpy, characterless, vulgar in detail, with poverty of invention and poorness of workmanship conspicuous, should be filled with the tears of a nation, great in war, in commerce, and in the sciences, and that strives to be and is going to be great in art, but every now and then gets a set-back like this.

The fact that probably ninety-nine out of every hundred persons thought it "mighty fine," only accentuates the ignorance of the public in matters of taste; while the fact that a great firm was not ashamed to exhibit such a proof of inaptitude, proves what a clutch commercialism has upon our throats.

For, if it is possible to find one tap-root which is the main source of vitality to our present disregard of art in industrial products, it is commercialism. Money, the desire of it, the getting of it, and our estimate of it, not only rules our lives but perverts our judgment. A sure seller that will cost little to produce is the aim of the manufacturer;

while the purchaser, according to his means, thinks he has a fine thing because it cost so much, or is satisfied with a poor thing because it cost so little. Men's eyes are dazzled with the glitter of the golden calf, and neither look for nor can see any beauty in perfection of design and craftsmanship. If in the contagious rivalry of a sales-room some picture sells for tens of thousands of dollars, we add our mite to the babel and say, "How beautiful!" To those canvases, not yet endorsed by the High Priests of Mammon, we turn the blind eye. We are sheep led by the golden bell of the financier, following the bob-tails of each other through any gap, provided it lead off the high road of common sense and sane judgment into some fresh field of novelty.

The Greeks, also, were continually in search of some new thing, and the Italians of the Renaissance, untiring in their pursuit of fresh knowledge; but the touchstone by which they tested everything was not money. They applied the principles of beauty and worth, which have made their productions classics. Until we do the same we shall be nothing but a commercial nation, and not a sagacious one at that. For in the open markets of the world it is not enough that our products should be always of good material and honestly made. It is much if they are that. But in those articles which admit of artistic treatment, other nations are making most strenuous efforts to render their manufactures beautiful as well as serviceable; and, if we wish to gain and hold supremacy we must attend to this side of the question also.

Clearly, it is not only an aesthetic one, otherwise we might wait until the Greek Calends for its consideration; but it is a very practical one to boot, involving the future welfare of our foreign trade. Hence it is beginning to receive attention from practical men as well as from those unintelligible, queer, purblind, left-behind-in-the-cold, and generally disgruntled anomalies—the art-lovers.

In the course of these introductory remarks, I have hinted at the respective responsibilities of the designer, manufacturer, and purchasing public, for the lack of art in our manufactures. These will afford topics for subsequent papers; meanwhile, let us lay the chief blame on ourselves. We, the purchasing public, get pretty much what we deserve, as I shall hope to prove hereafter.

CHARLES H. CAFFIN.